

***Hundreds of veterans denied benefits because of arbitrary deadline***

Burlington County – Today, Congressman John Adler, the only NJ member of the House Veterans Affairs (VA) Committee, sent a letter to House VA Chairman Bob Filner demanding an investigatory hearing into the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Claim Processing system. Recent news reports describe how local veterans are being denied benefits due solely to an arbitrary deadline. Congressman Adler, who heard similar complaints meeting with his local Veterans Advisory Board, expressed outrage that the veterans who sacrificed the most for their country are given no leniency on the US Department of Veterans Affairs' deadlines. It is estimated that two veterans a week are denied claims due to rigid regulations and 255 veterans were denied in total so far.

Congressman Adler, whose district includes more than 66,000 veterans, released the following statement about the VA's claim processing system:

"The VA's claim system is failing our veterans," said Congressman Adler. "I find it outrageous that the brave men and women who never hesitated to serve our country are cast aside over a deadline. Our veterans deserve better and I will work to ensure they receive the benefits they are owed."

Full text of the Congressman's letter is below:

April 7, 2010  
The Honorable Bob Filner  
Chairman, House Committee on Veterans Affairs  
335 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Filner:

I am writing in regard to recent news accounts of rigid filing deadlines that are effectively shutting the door on veterans who are applying for service-connected disability benefits. According to recent news reports, untold numbers of veterans with otherwise meritorious benefits claims are seeing their claims dismissed if they miss the deadline by even one day. It is unacceptable that a veteran would be denied benefits for injuries they sustained while fighting for this country simply because they missed an arbitrary filing deadline.

As you know, I represent more than 66,000 veterans that live in my district. To learn about the important issues facing the veteran community, I frequently meet with my Veterans' Advisory Board and visit local VFWs. At a recent meeting of my Veterans' Advisory Board, these veterans expressed frustration at the difficulty they have experienced in filing disability claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Specifically, these veterans believe that there is an adversarial culture within the VA wherein claims' processors do not even look at a veteran's disability claim until the second or third appeal, because they do not believe the veteran's assertion that their disability is service-connected. These veterans believe that, in the eyes of the VA, they are guilty until proven innocent.

These two issues are indicative of the broken claims' processing system at the VA. Accordingly, our committee must conduct investigatory hearings on the practical effect of the rigid filing deadlines cited in recent media reports as well as on the adversarial culture within the VA's claims' system. Our brave men and women who have served in battle deserve to come home to a welcoming country. These veterans must not be looked upon skeptically when they make a claim for service-connected disability benefits nor denied meritorious benefits because they have inadvertently missed a filing deadline. We must do all we can to fulfill President Lincoln's promise "to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan" by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's veterans.

Thank you for your prompt response to this request.

Sincerely,

John Adler  
Member of Congress